

Percy was committed to community life

By Christine McNeil

He got the cows off the streets in Mullumbimby, he came up with the idea of fixing up the dump left by the sand miners in Brunswick Heads to create Torakina Beach, and he fell in love first with a girl from Sydney and then with an orchid display at the Town Hall.

Percy Hale Sheaffe, who has died at 91, played an extraordinarily active and committed role in the life of the community in which he spent his whole life.

Born on the family farm in Goo-nengerry, the eldest of six, he knew from an early age that the life of a dairy farmer was not for him, and while still a teenager got his truck licence and a job as driver.

When the local bus service came up for sale, he bought it, a concern that eventually was to become the second largest fleet of buses behind



Percy Sheaffe.

Kirklands. He worked hard, but there were always the Saturday night dances, and at one of these a girl visiting from Sydney took a fancy to the bus driver and "made eyes at him all night," according to family lore, and in 1950 there were wedding bells for June and Percy.

Shortly after their marriage they went to an orchid show at the Town Hall and for both it was the beginning of a lifelong passion with the beauty of the exotic blooms.

Weekends were often spent on orchid hunting expeditions up in the hills, saving many a specimen from the loggers.

Percy was a founding member of the Byron District Orchid Society - "I think he went to an orchid meeting the night I was born" said son Paul - and besides competing in competitions, became a noted judge on the North Coast.

When he retired from the bus driv-

ing business in 1969, the family moved to Brunswick Heads where Percy built a nursery out the back, the orchids gradually took over, and the orchid business was born.

But beyond buses and orchids was the commitment to community life.

Percy was a member of Mullumbimby Municipal Council, in the days when it was a separate entity, and it was in this role that he initiated the project, with some prompting from his city bride, to get the wandering cows off the streets of Mullumbimby and back into the paddocks.

He joined Rotary in 1951, on the night of his first wedding anniversary according to June, and the pattern of never missing a meeting was set - in 2007 he received an award for 56 years of 100 percent attendance.

He was the first lay reader in the area of the Anglican Church, a role begun in Mullumbimby and continued in Brunswick Heads for many

years, and only ill health in recent years put a stop to a lifetime of active involvement in the church.

As a member of Brunswick Heads Progress Association he lobbied council, the RTA and the government for many year for the bypass, and after he came up with the idea for Torakina and someone said, "Let's get someone to do it," Percy's response was typical of his attitude to life in general.

"No, let's go and do it ourselves," he was reported to have said.

Percy's son Paul summed up his father as "a gentleman and a gentleman", a man of honour and commitment, someone who never gave less than 100 percent commitment to whatever he chose to become involved in.

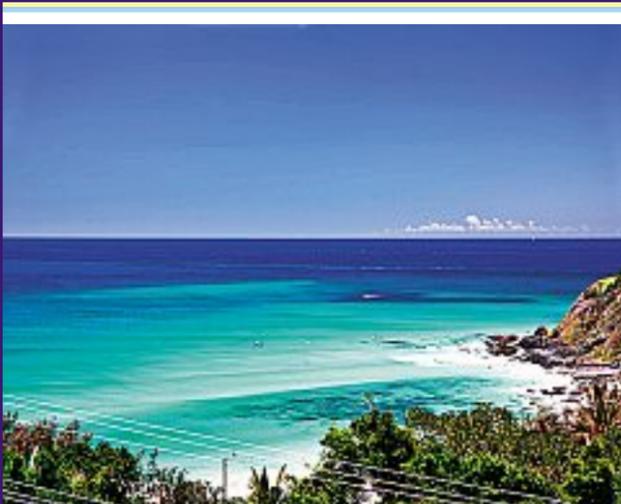
"I learned a lot from dad," said Paul, "about gardening, mechanics, driving, moral values, public speaking, honour and life."



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